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Klein Reports Kennedy Broke Cuban Story

(The writer, who is editor of the San Diego Union, was Press Secretary for Vice President Nixon during the 1960 Presidential campaign.)

By HERBERT G. KLEIN
Copley News Service

This is a story we of the Nixon staff couldn't tell during the 1960 Presidential campaign.

It is the story of the Cuban issue which the former Vice President has discussed briefly in his new book, "Six Crises," and which was disputed this past week by the President.

From the start of the 1960 campaign many of us were convinced that Cuba would be the deciding issue in a close election. Certainly, in retrospect, it was one of the decisive factors in what was the closest Presidential election of modern history.

Only four of us in the Nixon staff shared the secret that refugee troops were being trained for an eventual assault on Castro and a return to Cuba. We had stern instructions not to talk about this, and, despite many temptations, we protected security by remaining silent.

For a long time, as we campaigned across the country, we held the hope that the training would go rapidly enough to permit the beach landing. The defeat of Castro would have been a powerful factor for Richard Nixon and it would have been possible to reveal that the Vice President quite early in 1959 had in a memo to the House analyzed Castro as "an incredibly naive communist or under communist discipline."

Others also have told of his holding the tougher policy that led to the training.

Frequently we debated among ourselves the handling of the Cuban issue within security bonds. We heard the rumor that the Kennedy staff feared the beach assault would take place before the election. Why, on Oct. 20, Mr. Kennedy proposed direct intervention.

For the Vice President and his staff, the angriest moments of the campaign took place on Oct. 20 on the eve of the fourth television debate. We were in New York when Mr. Kennedy, late in the day, made a proposal which directly outlined the exact program which was being carried out — and which we had, for security reasons, kept secret.

Here is what we thought had happened:

First: On July 23 Allen Dulles, then head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Mr. Kennedy had concurred in announcing that he had been briefed in depth, with particular emphasis on Cuba and Africa. Nothing was withheld, the two told reporters. And we knew that this was in accord with orders given Mr. Dulles by President Eisenhower.

Second: Nixon had captured the initiative on the Cuban issue with his Miami statement urging a quarantine against Castro. And, in the best-coordinated part of the campaign, the administration had followed with quick orders putting this into effect.

It seemed obvious to us that Mr. Kennedy, after realizing he was losing points at a crucial point of the campaign, was striking back with secret material he had been given at the Dulles briefing. The White House was queried and we were told Mr. Kennedy had been informed about the troop training. Others told us President Eisenhower was angry over the disclosure.

In the light of what I knew of happenings at that time, I was, of course, surprised last week at Mr. Dulles' statement which corroborates President Kennedy's position that he wasn't told about the troop training.